

Poorer countries are most vulnerable: Fast-spreading Indian variant and limited vaccine supplies threaten global recovery

In the United States, which has detected more than 800 cases of the variant from India, a glut of vaccines has given health officials a ready supply of tools for fighting the fast-evolving virus.

But even other wealthy nations, like Britain, are in more difficult positions. To stretch its supply of vaccines, the country extended the gap between the first and second doses of AstraZeneca, Pfizer and Moderna vaccines.

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[However, a] first dose of either the Pfizer or AstraZeneca vaccines provided only about 34 percent protection against the variant first seen in India, a relatively steep drop from the roughly 51 percent protection a single dose of either of those vaccines offer against the earlier variant from Britain.

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For many poorer nations, starved for vaccines, there is little choice but to leave long delays between first and second doses.... If the variant from India spreads as quickly in other countries as it has in Britain, the burden on unvaccinated nations may grow.

"It's a warning," Professor [of global public health at the University of Edinburgh Devi] Sridhar said. "What we're seeing in India is being repeated in Nepal, it's being repeated in other countries. You need to get ahead of it."

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